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News Release



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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE WILL NOT CONDUCT IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF TWO CALIFORNIA BUTTERFLIES FOR LISTING CONSIDERATION

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced that two petitions – one to list the Thorne's hairstreak butterfly and the other to list the Hermes Copper butterfly – under the Endangered Species Act do not contain substantial information to indicate listing is warranted. The negative findings on the two petitions were published in the Federal Register on August 8, 2006.

The petitions to list the species were submitted to the Service by the Center for Biological Diversity in 2004. Under the Endangered Species Act, the Service is required to review the petitions in a process known as 90-day finding and determine whether they contain substantial information to warrant listing.

The Hermes copper butterfly is a small, brightly colored butterfly restricted to areas containing its larval host plant, spiny redberry. Spiny redberry commonly grows in coastal-sage scrub, chaparral and the woodlands of California.

The Thorne's hairstreak butterfly has reddish brown wings with dark brown shading and is restricted to areas that contain its larval host plant, Tecate cypress. Associated with chaparral ecosystems in southern California and northern Baja California, Tecate cypress occurs primarily on north-facing slopes from near sea level to over 4,200 feet in elevation.

The petitioner claimed that both species are highly vulnerable to extinction due to the threat of wildfire and prescribed fire that could destroy their host and nectar plants. However, the Service found that frequency of fire in occupied habitat over the past century is not high enough on average to threaten Thorne's hairstreak butterfly. With regard to Hermes copper butterfly, the Service found that information provided does not substantiate the petitioner's claim. Furthermore, both subspecies appear to be able to re-colonize burned areas over time.

The petitioner also claimed that few regulatory mechanisms currently exist that might conserve the butterflies' habitat. The Service determined that current Federal regulations and activities provide a significant level of protection for the Thorne's hairstreak butterfly and/or its habitat on Federal lands that include the subspecies entire known range. Substantial information was not provided to indicate the Hermes copper butterfly is threatened at this time by inadequacy of existing Federal mechanisms.

The petitioner claimed that fragmentation of habitat, fire, roads, and other natural or manmade factors pose a significant threat to the species. The Service reported that while these factors may impact these two species to some degree, the significance of these threats remains unknown because of a lack of specific information documenting threats of fragmentation, isolated populations, and climate change to the species or its host plant.

Although the Service will not be commencing a 12 month in-depth status review in response to these petitions, it will continue to monitor potential threats and ongoing management actions that might be important with regard to the conservation of the Thorne's hairstreak and Hermes copper butterflies.

These findings were prepared pursuant to a court order resulting from a lawsuit filed against the Service by the Center for Biological Diversity. Copies of the petition findings are available on the Internet at <http://carlsbad.fws.gov> or by contacting the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office at 760-431-9440.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 546 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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